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NENIDANIA VERSIA ROMANA OF ALEXANDRIE.

An Inedited Version of the Legend of Alexander the Great. By Dr. A. HARKAVY (in Russian). St. Petersburg, 1892.

THERE can be no doubt that the Jews borrowed much from the mythology and folk-lore of other nations, even in the earliest periods. The history of the Creation, of Paradise, of the Deluge, and of the Tower of Babel, bear an Assyro-Babylonian colouring. The history of the Patriarchs has probably an Aramaic origin, and that of Joseph and Moses is not free from Egyptian influence. The Book of Job will have to be taken as an adaptation from an Edomitico-Nabathean ethico-philosophical epos. It is certain that no nation can help borrowing parables and similitudes from neighbours with whom they are in contact; indeed the words in Numbers xxii. 27, "Wherefore they that speak in proverbs (משלים)", means most likely authors of parables and similitudes in general. So much for the earlier literature. Later on arose the various apocryphal books, which contain undeniably Persian and Greek ideas, set in a half-Judaic dress. Indeed, such borrowings are traced by critical writers even in the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and in Daniel, which are partly, at least, contemporary with the beginning of some of the apocryphal literature. Through foreign ideas, the Hebrew idiom was also greatly influenced, in Job, Ecclesiastes, and much more in the Mishnah, for foreign ideas can only be expressed by foreign words and expressions. The Talmudic and Midrashic literature makes no mystery of the foreign elements which the Rabbis had embodied there in a Rabbinical garment. Later Midrashim, such as a part of the Midrash *Rabboth*, the *Tanhuma-Yelamdenu*, the Midrash on the Megilloth, the Prophets, and Hagiographa, not to speak of the chapters of R. Eliezer and the *Tana debe Eliyahu*, which already touch the borders of the Middle Ages, abound in Greek and other alien words, and consequently also in foreign sayings and folk-lore.

This period is followed by avowed borrowing of books not written by Jews, but translated or adapted from the Greek, Latin, and mostly from Arabic. Such are, to mention only a few of the most important ones, the famous *Yosipon* attributed to Joseph ben Gorion the priest, the fables of Bıdpai, better known as *Catila ve Dimnah*, which R. Meir knew, most likely from a Syriac translation, in the second century; the fables of the foxes, translated or adapted by Berechiah Naqdan; the fables of Esop and Loqmān; and the old fables by Isaac ben Sahulah. We shall not take much notice of the translation of philosophical books, and those bearing upon natural science, mathematics, astronomy and astrology of all kinds. The literature of translations will soon be exhaustively known by Dr. Steinschneider's

great life-work, which is very far advanced, and will most likely appear in the course of the year. Perhaps we might just mention the adaptation of Barlaam and Josaphat by Abraham ben Hisdai with the title of *בן המלך והנזיר*, "Prince and Nazirite"; of the Book of Animals translated by the famous Calonymos ben Meir, with the title of *אגרת בעלי חיים*, treatises which were much read amongst the Jews in the Middle Ages.

We know that many romances were also translated into Hebrew; for instance, the Round Table, which is to be found in the MS. Urbin., No. 48, (fol. 75), of the Vatican Library (Assemani's Catalogue, fol. 442). It is headed as follows: *זה ספר השמר הטבלה העגולה של מלך ארטוט* (sic), *ארטוט* (Assemani reads *ואני*). "This is the profane book, the Round Table of King Arthur, which I have translated into Hebrew from the Laaz (French or Italian) in the year [50]39 = 1279." The translator says that he translated it for the following two reasons: 1. To employ his time when in misery. Books of this kind, he adds, are not only not inferior to the fables called *כובסים* (Bab. Talmud Succah, fol. 28a), but they are much superior (ואלה הספורים אינם פחותים ממשלי כובסים אדרבא הם מעולים ונכבדים מהם). 2. In order that sinners should learn from them the ways of repentance, to remember the end and therefore repent (כדי שילמדו החוטאים דרכי התשובה ויזכרו אחרית וישובו). A German version in Hebrew characters exists in several editions (see Steinschneider's Catalog. Bodl., p. 1540), and a MS. fragment of it is to be found in Dr. Giusburg's library (see Is. Letterbode, xi. p. 165.)

There is a Hebrew translation of *Amadis de Gaula* from the Spanish, and a considerable number of legends and poems were translated or adapted from the German. We shall mention of the latter the well-known piece beginning *הר נדיא* (to be found in the Hagadah, according to the Germano-Polish rite), which is an adaptation of a German poem corresponding to the English one, beginning, "This is the house that Jack built." That romances were the favourite reading of the Jews in Northern France and in the German-speaking countries can be gathered from Dr. Steinschneider's able lecture on what the Jews were reading in the *Archiv für Literaturgeschichte* (edited by the late Professor Gosche), t. II. (1870), pp. 1 to 20.

But the most popular saga amongst the Jews was the famous history of Alexander the Great. His journey to the dark mountains in Africa, where he met Amazons, is mentioned in early Aggadahs. It seems that the Amazons are not quite legendary; the kingdom of Dahomey

has now a considerable regiment of them. Josephus mentions the iron gates by which Alexander enclosed the people of the Alans in Hyrcania. Most of these legends are borrowed from the history of Alexander by Pseudo-Callisthenes. We shall pass by the notices of this history to be found in the *Yosipon*, in the travels of Benjamin of Tudela and the Samaritan Chronicle with the title of "The Book of Joshua." For bibliographical details we refer the reader to Dr. Harkavy's monograph, the use of which, we are afraid, will not be a general one, since it is written in Russian, a language which has not yet got the citizenship amongst Western scholars.

The text of Pseudo-Callisthenes, probably according to the substance given by the Archpresbyter Leo, known as *Historia de Preliis*, was translated into Arabic, and from it into Hebrew, by the well-known Samuel ben Thibbon (better Thabbon), which is to be found in MSS. in the Libraries of Paris, Parma, Turin, and the Jews' College in London (Catal. No. 145.) In the last MS. a colophon states that it was translated about the time when Samuel made the translation of Maimonides' philosophical work, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. (See Dr. M. Friedländer's English translation of this work, vol. iii., p. xi. *seqq.* London, 1885.) The Colophon continues as follows:—"This book was found in the hands of some people, translated by Harizi (Judah ben Solomon al.), but in a very confused state, for his translation was made from the [?] language; whilst Thibbon translated from the Arabic." The lacuna must be filled up with the word לטין or ספרר, Latin or Spanish, for Harizi could only have translated from the Arabic, Latin (if he knew this language) or Spanish. Dr. Harkavy says, ingeniously, that Harizi's translation does not refer to the text of the history of Alexander, but to that of Maimonides' philosophical book. We know indeed that Harizi made a slavish translation of it; which is nearly unintelligible (this translation is now published), but as Harizi says himself that he translated from the Arabic, the writer of the Colophon must have known it. Thus the statement about Harizi's translation remains for the present unsolved, for it is possible that Harizi made a translation of the *Historia de Preliis*. Moreover, the words וזה הספר seem to refer more naturally to the words זה הספר at the beginning of the Colophon, than to the words הספרה, which follow later.

Out of this MS. and the *Yosipon*, Dr. M. Gaster has supplied an article to M. Vesselowski's treatise, published in the Miscellany of the transactions of the Academy of St. Petersburg, with the title of "New Data Concerning the History of the Romance of Alexander (in Russian)." Dr. Harkavy, on his side, gives observations on Dr. Gaster's notes at the end of his monograph (from pp. 100—109),

some of which seem to be plausible. But besides the variations of the first edition of *Yosipon*, it remains also to take notice of the Arabic text, although it does not contain the history of Alexander.

When we have mentioned another translation of the *Historia de Preliis*, made from the Latin by the well-known astronomer, Immanuel of Tarascon (about 1365; see M. Israel Levi's learned essay with the title of ספר תולדות אלכסנדר, in the *Sammelband* published by the Society מקיצי נרדמים, II., 1886, p. 1, *seqq.*), we have done with the text of Leo. But there is another text of the Alexander saga, which has nothing to do with that of Pseudo-Callisthenes, of which a Hebrew translation is to be found in a MS. at the Estense Library at Modena, and of which the beginning and the end is given by M. Levi (*op. cit.*, p. xv.). Another copy of it (rather incomplete) was discovered, some three years ago, by Dr. Harkavy at Damascus, which he brought home together with some other remarkable MSS. (see *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, Oxford, 1887, p. XIV. and XXII.). With the help of this MS. and the Modena text, which M. Levi has put at his disposal, Dr. Harkavy gives a complete description of the new text with references to many other books which bear on the Alexander saga. In this text we find the wizard Bildad, son of Ason, for Necatanabus, of the *Historia de Preliis*, and there is no mention in this text of any kingdom of Macedonia and of the wars in Persia. The author develops these features of the story which have any relation to Biblical subjects, and adds many things in the later Oriental style.

But as Mosconi says in his preface to the *Yosipon* (see *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, Hebrew, p. II., p. 21, and M. I. Levi *op. cit.*, p. xii.), that he had several texts before him which were more or less abridged, and in some of which many stories are added, the same was most likely the case with the Modena-Damascus text. Indeed, there has lately turned up a third MS. of this text, which abounds in variations. This MS., belonging formerly to the lamented R. Rabbinowicz, is now in the Bodleian Library, No. Hebrew d. 11 (see *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, Oxford, 1887, p. xix. *seqq.*). On fol. 265 commences the Alexander saga, of which we shall give the beginning and the end. A copy of the entire MS. was made for Dr. M. Gaster; perhaps he will sooner or later give us a critical edition of this text in connection with the MSS. of Damascus and of Modena. The Bodleian text begins as follows:—

אתחיל ספר אלכסנדרום מוקדון:

ויהי בימים ההם ויהי מלך בארץ מצרים ושמו פוליפוס ויהי המלך ההוא רחב לב ורחב ידים ואוהב משפט וצדקה אשר לא קם כמוהו בכל ארץ מצרים וכל עמו אהבו אותו ושם אישתו נולפירא (sic) המלכה והיא הייתה

אשה יפה אשר לא קם כמוה ויהי בארץ ההוא מכשף אחר ושמו בלדר המכשף אשר לא קם כמוהו בכל ארץ מצרים ויעש בכישופיו כל מה שלבו חפץ ויפול לבו על גולפירא אשת פוליפּו המלך וימת לבו בקרבו מרוב אהבה אשר אהבה ויחל בלדר ג' ימים ויתחזק בלדר ביום השלישי וישען על מקלו לראות היועיל תוחלתו אם לא ויקטר העשבים ט' ימים רצופים ויפול גורלו על המלכה וישמח בלדר שמחה גדולה :

It ends on fol. 277b. as follows :—

ויהי ככלותו לצוות ויאסוף רגלו על המטה וימת בתחלואים רעים כי הסם שיבר כל עצמותיו ויבכו עליו חיילותיו שבעים יום ויעברו ימי בכיתו ויקחו את גוף אלכסנדרוס ויחתכוהו חתיכות חתיכות ויבשלו אותם וילקטו העצמות ויתנום בעור צבי להוליכם ארץ מצרים ויערכו כלי מלחמתם וישבו ארצה מצרים ויבואו מוקדוניא אל אמו מקץ שלש שנים למיתת אלכסנדרוס ויביאו אל המלכה גלופטריאה כל שכיות החמדה ואבן יקרה וימליכוה ויתנו עליה כתר מלכות ותמלוך חמש עשרה שנים ככל תאוות לבה ואת טולמייא ואת צביל ואת פוליסיים ואת אנאני השליטה על כל הממלכה ותעש המלכה משפט וצדקה : ואת עצמות אלכסנ' לא קברה המלכה כי נתנם באוצרותיה ואמרה ביום מותי יקברו עצמות בני בקברי ותמת המלכה בת שמונים ותשע שנים ויקברו אותה בקברות המלכים ואת עצמות אלכסנדרוס נתנו בקברה ואת הממלכה ניתנה לארבעה השרים וישפטו את עם הארץ כל ימי חייהם ויעשו משפט וצדקה בארץ ואת כל שכיות החמדה אשר אצר אלכסנדרוס (sic) בהיכל דיגוניא לקחו משם ובנו היכל גדול אש לא נעשה כמוהו בכל ארץ מצרים מיום הוסדה : נשלם הספר של אלכסנדרוס למוקדון אשר מלך בבית שני :

A. NEUBAUER.